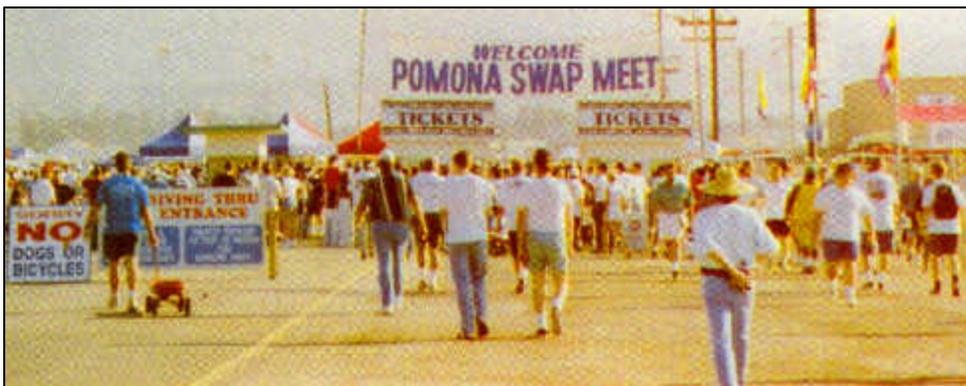
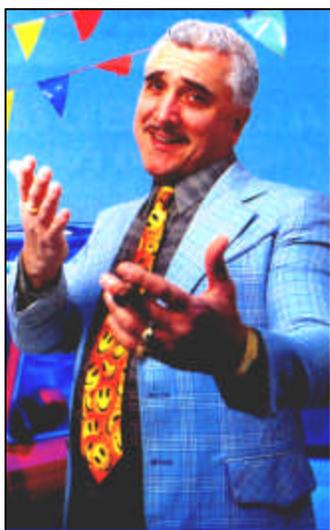
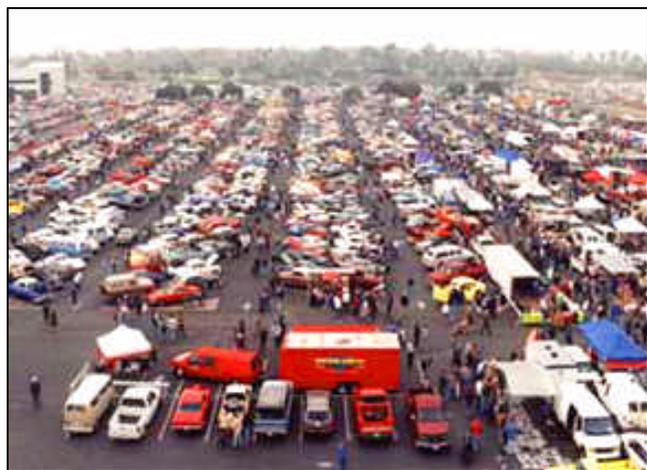


Lessons from the Pomona Swap Meet

About every 6 weeks, seekers and hustlers alike, converge here to exchange classic cars, parts, and classic flim/flam wisdom, at the West's largest scheduled meet. It's about 30 miles East of Los Angeles. "Caveat Emptor!"



It's not just the chance to shop for classic cars in one place at one time (instead of driving hundreds of miles just to see one), but it's the chance to pay for the privilege of digesting pricey yet pre-prepared snack bar foods, and for sleeping in a large overcrowded parking lot. Motivated sellers drag out their nearly-restored, un-restored, and basket case classic Camaros, Mustangs, Pontiacs, 'Vettes, and just about most of the attractive models that used to cruise boulevards back in the 70's to Pomona, to try to cash in on Barrett-Jackson auction price trends for their homegrown serviced heaps. Most don't sell, and many return time after time, testimony to cash-indebtedness of the masses of 'lookie-lou' enthusiasts (no one here takes American Express!). There are also some parts sold, but Ebay has cleaned out most serious collections, so nothing offered here is really special.

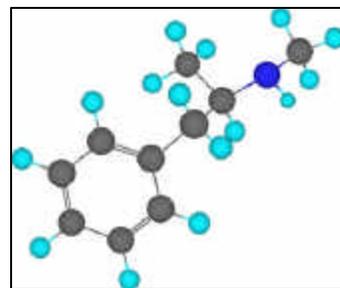


Then, there's this guy. Not exactly, as there are so many of him here, that the photo just illustrates the composite that this text describes. This is about the character that made the Pomona Swap Meet his school, and now it's his business and practically his home. A real 'piece of work,' he's your newest friend, who'll sell you your dreams, then hand over your next nightmare, smiling all the time.

It's survival of the fittest in Pomona, and that means the guy who buys the real deal at bottom dollar (when it's just being trailered in on Saturday), then adds his percentage (when cars are sold to the public on Sunday), is the guy who makes out the best here. There's more to it than that; it's the art of making that happen. Some years ago, I spent the weekend sunning myself in a lawn chair, testing the market for a classic vehicle, when I had the time for a more detailed observation of what this 'society' here has produced. You do have to know it, then see it, to quite believe it!

First, readers have to understand that Southern California was the original home to yet another trend, which in this case is now the genuine and shared national tragedy of methamphetamine 'meth' use and addiction. While the younger users frequently go off the rails and into rehab quickly, statistics show a large adult population (now in their 40's) can't quit using it, and find alternative income sources to feed their habits.

Most regular employers won't accept the "tweaker's" lack of discipline, inability to conform to regular work hours or common business procedures, and their entirely mood-based behavior. But wired users feel they are smarter than other people, even when the substance causes them to ramble non-stop for hours about whatever crosses their mind (annoying non-users because they can't hold another's line of thought for more than a minute). Strangely though, this verbal assertion combined with feigned friendliness does get results in the sales field. Tweaker's also like taking apart cars and metal machines, so their hobby becomes scrap-metal reclamation — the cliché is they can be spotted by their yards strewn with disassembled objects. So Pomona's wheel-and-deal world here attracts them, with emphasis on cars & cash, and because it attracts a new group of victims on a regular basis. This trend is spreading, which is why this article was written — so you'll likely have a chance to recognize this behavior, as you see it, by car salesmen near you.



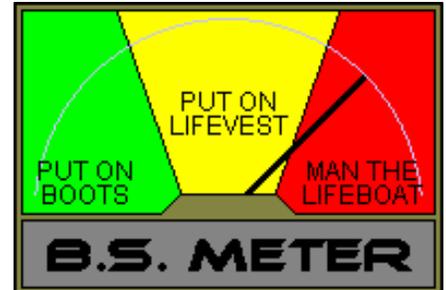
'Meth' is Bad Stuff!!

Why the car dealer isn't quite the new friend he seems to be

Buy:

The hustler's game is buy low, sell high. So if you're trying to sell to him, this side of his personality is critical and browbeating. A few minor imperfections are spotted and commented upon. Nothing you're selling (you're told) will be bought by anybody else — so the hustler is doing you a favor with his rock-bottom offer. And you'd better take his low ball bid (as he flashes cash) NOW (because he's says he's not coming back), or he says it's going to be sad (with a laugh of derision) for you because you're going to have to take your car or parts all the way back home. This style works best at night, when people get tired and they surrender their powers of reason for the promise of some sleep — whereas the user is fueled up. He knows he's got you, if you start to follow him as he seems to start to walk away. But even when you sell, the deal changes:

The buyer asks for delivery, and will change the terms when you arrive (trying to make a non-cash trade). Many folks just give up at this point, and the hustler has his next victim (while the seller feels like he really needs a shower).



Sell:

The hustler, when selling, is the Donald Trump of sleaze. You'll get a smile and a warm welcome, as if you're his newest friend, while he sizes you up (looking through you, trying to determine what interests you, and how much money you've got). Sales "lines" are borrowed from others and it's a competition to see just how many of them you'll swallow: Other sellers aren't honest, but you can trust him. Value and performance aren't just an improvement — they're "double" or "triple" what others can provide. A self-proclaimed expert, he wants you to rely on his market price (it's higher if you're European), and how much you'll save, buying now from only him.. With long-time hustlers, logic and language degenerate into superlatives; You'll hear "always" & "forever" frequently. And if the car needs service, or 'preparation,' he knows just how to set you up for that too. Why this works, is the average buyer will show his interest in a car, and will take the words of the hustler at face value (to avoid the perception of being rude), until the verbal assertiveness of the seller just wears him down. But to the seller, it's just another game.

The Art of the Deal:

Fortunately, there are ways to deal with the hustler, when he has something you want and you have the funds to buy. Understand and practice, low-key verbal confrontation. Watch the seller in action, and talk to others, to learn his style. When negotiating, keep smiling, but rapidly question every unlikely claim you're being fed, as you spend valuable time inspecting every aspect of the car or parts you plan to purchase. (Don't fall for the sudden, oversensitive "persecution complex," or angry/demanding reactions either, when you point out issues like valuable missing parts). Beware the new, cheap, paint job (is there overspray on the shocks or exhaust?) or a new set of carpet, and use a small magnet to inspect for bondo body-filler — a giveaway of body damage or rust-repair (and never accept pressure to buy a car at night). While you're inspecting, try not to get sucked in by the seller's verbal ramble, and have a counter-claim ready: The price is simply "too much," or the same car you're being sold was in better condition and priced for less, by another available seller nearby. If you're negotiating multiple cars or parts, pick 3 upfront (that you really don't want), and reject each as being overpriced, then to ask for a price on the 4th or 5th car or part (which you really want). Just say "**NO**" to service and storage arrangements tied to a sale, to avoid additional/hidden costs (or, undefined future 'credit' arrangements), and to avoid having to deal with the long repair-project delays and the inevitable spells of forgetfulness, paranoia and delusion (that afflict the meth-head). And, ALWAYS, get all deal terms in writing (bring a camera & bill of sale form with you), for recourse, in small-claims court if necessary, once the car is home (especially if he can't be reached on the phone after the sale).

Consider the Home Front, too.

Have a plan in mind, for towing or trailering a newly purchased vehicle home. Have phone numbers of friends or a rental or tow company (maybe even the auto club) handy.

How you deal with the home front: Space arrangements, project financing, and the prospect of some of your free time spent in a greasy work shirt, is up to you!

(Cartoon reprinted with permission, from Tim Coy of CadillaclaSalleclub.org's "Self Starter" newsletter, issue 1/2006)

